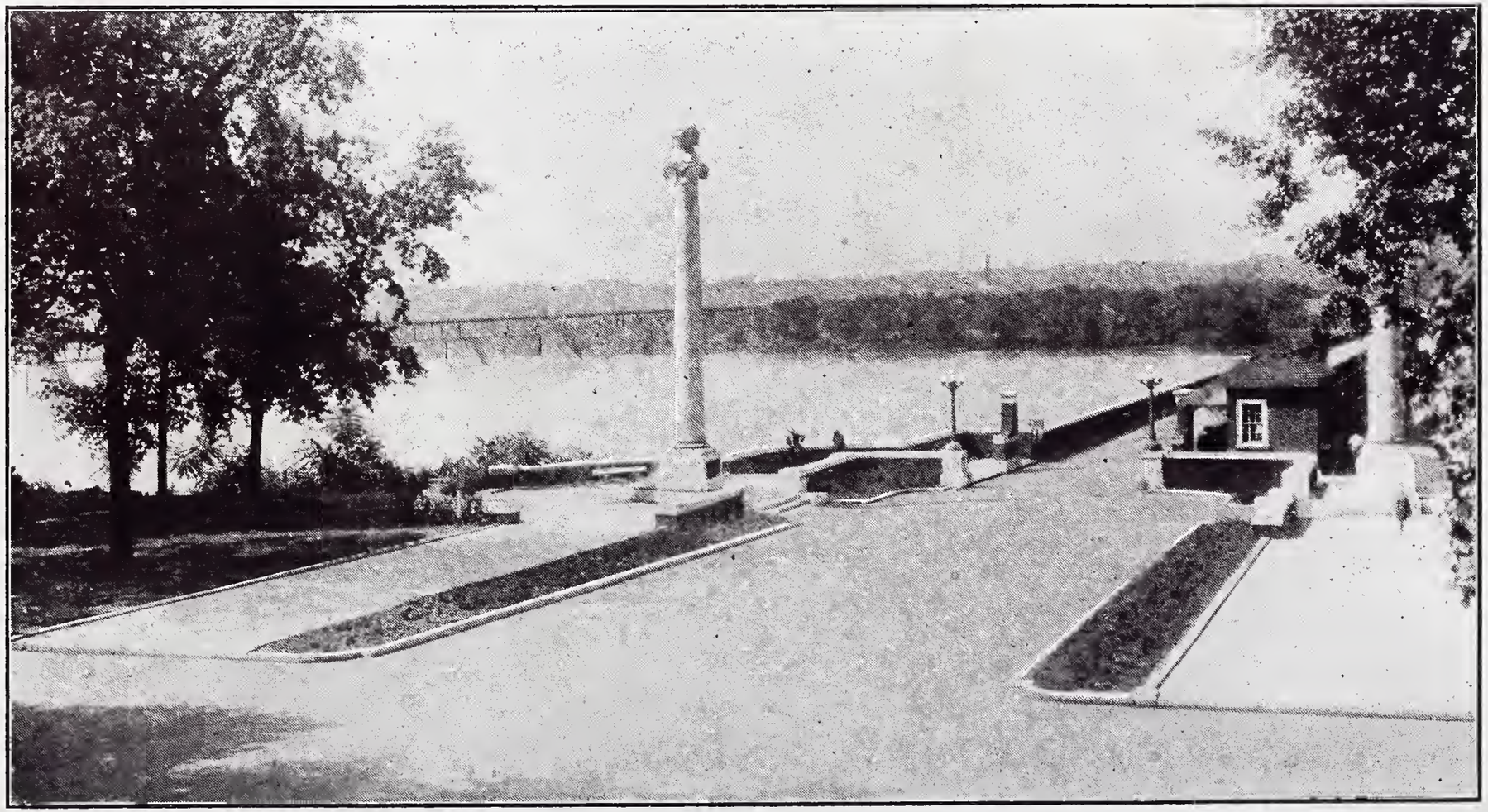
Our City
and Its Future

The City Entrance



Our City and Its Future

Address delivered by Vance C. McCormick at The Fifteen Years of Public Improvements Celebration Reception in Chestnut Street Auditorium, Harrisburg, Pa., September 23d, 1915, under the auspices of The Chamber of Commerce.

I deeply appreciate the honor of being invited by the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to take part in this celebration commemorating the completion of the City's public improvements during the past fifteen years.

I realize that it is as an ex-city official, holding office during the inception and planning of this great work, I am to speak to you for a few moments. If I have played any small part in this movement for a New City, I shall always rejoice in this fact and shall always be grateful that I was a City Councilman when our City was stirred to its depth, after years of intermittent discussion of our City's needs, by the eloquent address of Miss Mira Dock, on "The City Beautiful," in December, 1900, before a large gathering of our citizens at the Harrisburg Board of Trade, under the auspices of the Civic Club, because it gave me an opportunity in an official capacity to join with many other interested citizens and City officials in helping to bring about a concrete and comprehensive plan of action for our City's betterment. Realizing the necessity of expert advice before I could submit anything practical to Councils, I had already secured the services of a well known engineer, Mr. W. H. Dechant, of Reading, Pa.,

who submitted to me on December 31st, 1900, a preliminary report upon the River Front, Paxton Creek improvements and the City sewerage system, and acting upon this report, on May 13th, 1901, I introduced into Common Council an ordinance authorizing the submission of the question of increasing the debt of the City of Harrisburg Five Hundred and Twenty-five Thousand Dollars ($525,000) for the following purposes:

> "To straighten, deepen, pave, construct sidewalls in and otherwise improve Paxton Creek, from Reily street to the mouth of the said Creek;
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> "To extend all public sewers now emptying into the Pennsylvania canal to said creek; to construct a wall along the eastern shore of the Susquehanna River immediately west of low water line of 1803 from Seneca Street to Dock Street; and to extend all sewers emptying into said river beyond said wall; and to pay the cost of the construction of the Schuylkill and Seventh streets sewer from Paxton Creek to Seneca Street, to the qualified electorate of the City."

About this time in the Harrisburg Telegraph appeared an article by Mr. J. V. W. Reynders, making an excellent suggestion that a fund of $5,000 be raised with which to obtain additional expert advice and well considered plans for all work needed. The proposal met with such unanimous approval that all our plans in Council were held in abeyance until the new plans were finally adopted and what followed is a familiar story to you all. On December 5th, 1901, I introduced in Common Council an ordinance authorizing the submission of the question of increasing the indebtedness of the City of Harrisburg $1,090,000. Subsequently, as Mayor of the City, elected on the improvement platform, it was my great privilege to sign the ordinance introduced by Mr. William

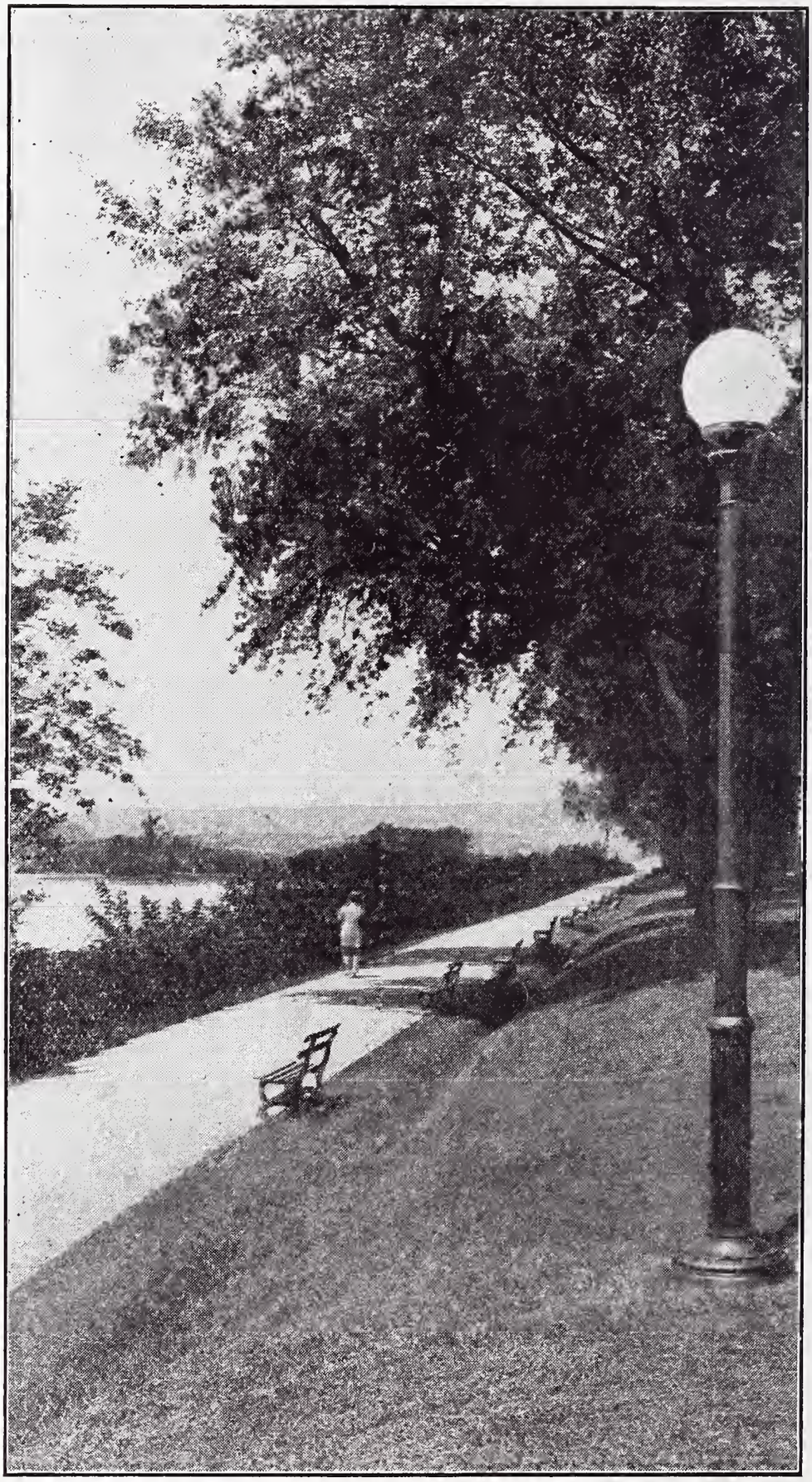
Jennings and directed by him through Councils, putting the improvements in effect, and also to assist in the actual execution of the work. The real story of the great effort expended in organizing the improvement campaign of education, securing the legislation and the many trials and difficulties of putting them into execution has never been published and will probably never be fully known, nor the sacrifices and unselfish devotion of many of our best citizens, who cheerfully gave the best within them for the City's welfare without any hope of reward, save the satisfaction of knowing that they had faithfully lived up to their responsibility as American citizens and had labored for the welfare of their fellow men.

I wish I could enumerate to you from my own personal experience the names of those faithful citizens to whom honor is due, but, if there is one man above others who stands out pre-eminently as a patriot in all these long years of improvement campaigns, it is J. Horace McFarland, the creator of our park system, and who to my mind has done more than any other man for the parks and public improvements of Harrisburg. I regret I have not more time for reminiscences but it would be interesting to recall some of the narrow escapes that some of the parts of the improvement program encountered, such as the vote upon the new Mulberry Street Viaduct, which was carried by only a few votes and that majority only decided after the opening of the ballot boxes and a recount in Court. Few of our citizens also realize the difficulties of securing the passage of the park improvement ordinance, which met with serious

opposition in the City Councils, due to the fact that our Councilmen did not fully understand Mr. Manning's plans. When the ordinance seemed doomed it occurred to some of us that if the Councilmen could see the real thing in operation in another city rather than blue prints, their opinions would change. I, therefore, secured contributions of $100 each from five leading financial institutions and personally called upon Mr. Cassatt, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, and told him of the crisis reached in our improvement scheme, in which he was keenly interested. He had always said he wanted a better Harrisburg for the ten thousands of Pennsylvania Railroad Company employes living here, and he generously offered two sleeping cars and free transportation over their lines, which, with the funds in hand, made it possible for us to visit Boston and there, under the guidance of that city's park officials, the finest park system of the country was inspected, with its parkways, fenways, playgrounds and general parks. The effect was instantaneous. Fifty of the City officials had seen the real thing and before the day was over some of our Councilmen became so ambitious that to them the Manning plan was too modest and they wanted to amend the ordinance to include the entire Rockville Mountain for a metropolitan park system, similar to the one they had seen in Massachusetts; and thus was made possible our park plan.

In all these years of civic progress the potent forces behind the improvements, directing the work and representing the taxpayers' interests,

A River Park View



were the Municipal League, the Civic Club and the Board of Trade, under the leadership of such men and women as Mr. Robert Snodgrass and Mrs. Lyman D. Gilbert, and many others succeeding them, who all stood loyally behind every loan and whose campaign of education helped to secure their adoption by the people.

But enough about the past—what about the future?

Let us look forward. What a great vision we have of a still Greater Harrisburg! A City unsurpassed in its ideal situation on the banks of the Susquehanna at the junction of the fertile valleys of Cumberland and Lebanon, wonderfully favored by nature and built upon broad, progressive and aesthetic lines by a happy and prosperous people. The work of the past fifteen years is only a forerunner of what is to be and the City of the future will stand as a monument to the enterprise and wisdom of a progressive citizenship. What a panorama will be unfolded before one who in future years stands on the summit of Reservoir Park and overlooks that great City of hundreds of thousands, reaching out for miles in every direction, embracing within its limits all of the neighboring small towns and solidly built up from Rockville to Middletown and from Camp Hill to Hummelstown.

This is no idle dream but fast becoming a fact. Our parkways and Wildwood Park, which when first created seemed far away from the center of population, will then be parks and breathing spaces in the thickly settled parts of our City, grown far beyond its old limits, and the people will arise and bless their forefathers

for their foresight in making possible the beautiful parks, which could not have been obtained in later years as the cost would have been prohibitive.

From this high vantage point we can follow the completed parkway encircling the entire City, permitting a drive of twenty miles, unequaled in beauty by any city in this country; winding its way from Reservoir Park to the State Arsenal, on through the grounds of the State Lunatic Hospital to Wildwood Park; thence West to the River Front and seven miles along the river bank to Spring Creek, where the park roadway connects with the Cameron Park Extension through to Paxtang, and then completes the circuit at Reservoir Park. This encircling parkway drive will be joined at many points by other parkways, leading away through small wooded valleys, far out through the new parts of the City, and connecting also the parkway of Steelton at a point near the County Home in the Cameron Extension.

And again from this high point we can look down to the State Capitol buildings, situated in the very heart of the City, surrounded by its beautiful parks, extending to the Pennsylvania Railroad, and thus visible to the millions of passengers travelling through our City, so that by the travelling public we are no longer recognized as a city of back yards. It is in our Capitol park that we have located our well designed band stand, from which are given free concerts by the City Municipal Band several evenings each week during the open season, and with concerts in the other City parks will give our music-loving people the

pleasures and advantages the foreign cities have enjoyed at municipal expense for many years. Our State Government having outgrown the main Capitol buildings will have grouped about the park new buildings and in conjunction with the City with its City Hall and High School will make this a great State and Civic center of a most imposing character. The old State Street Bridge will have been replaced by a broad and light subway, but architecturally in keeping with the dignity of so important a boulevard, extending out to the park circle at the junction of State and Walnut streets, and from that radius creating another important highway into Dauphin County and the East.

Again let our vision take us to the center of Market Square. There, standing on an isle of safety, amidst an attractive architectural setting, possibly alongside of a statue of John Harris, note the uniform sky-line of buildings surrounding the Square, reminding one of Paris and Berlin; and then turning our eyes eastward along our busiest thoroughfare, Market Street, we note that even the trolley poles and all overhead wires have disappeared, a more modern system of transportation making them unnecessary, and uniform and attractively designed signs, like those of the well-governed foreign cities, under civic control. (At Fourth and Market streets we see the magnificent new station of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, with its plaza, monuments and fountains, occupying the entire block, made necessary by the ever increasing traffic of our great City, and glancing down Fourth Street toward the Mulberry Street Viaduct, we would there see a fitting entrance

so that important structure, with an attractive spacious circle at the juncture of Fourth and Chestnut streets, thereby relieving congested traffic conditions at that point. Resuming our vista of Market Street, in vain we look for the hole in the ground known in ancient history as the Market Street Subway, because it will have entirely vanished and in its place will be Market Street in its full width, carried under the railroad tracks without losing its identity, and making it in reality what it should be, one of our greatest thoroughfares, from Front Street to our City limits, and even extending beyond that far into Dauphin County, making an easy and welcome access for our neighbors, the farmers, upon whom we depend for our daily existence.

Turning again, we view South Second Street, another broad, bustling highway, passing by the great local freight station of the Pennsylvania Railroad at Mulberry street, and through the warehouse district to Paxton Street, absolutely free from all grade crossings, the main artery to Steelton, via Paxton and Cameron streets, a route a half mile shorter than now via Market and Cameron Streets, and also extending out Paxton Street to where it intercepts the Parkway at Paxtang, thus developing a large, attractive residential section of the City between the Reading Railroad and what was formerly Steelton, and also giving ready access for the great manufacturing industries built up along the Reading Railroad and the hill district to the warehouses and manufacturing sections of South Second Street and that vicinity.

The Capitol From Reservoir Park

Harrisburg Academy and
Seiler Dormitory

Facing North we then turn our backs on the wholesale and manufacturing districts and looking up Second Street see before us a new retail shopping district of our Metropolitan City, which for sometime past has expanded beyond the confines of Market Street and its immediate tributaries, and has extended far up the new Second Street, until it merges gradually into the residential section with its attractive homes on both sides of the street; and passing through the Harrisburg Academy, grown to a school of hundreds of pupils, with its quadrangle completed, with its dormitories, gymnasium, swimming pool, chapel and additional school buildings—a continuous main highway to Rockville.

Let us leave the isle of safety and stroll out Market Street to the River and the City Entrance and we will there marvel at the enterprise and progressive spirit that has created a great monumental bridge of exceptional architectural beauty, free at last, erected jointly by the State, Counties and City, being the connecting link to the South and West and leading to the high water mark and famous battlefields of the Civil War. This monumental structure will carry foot passengers and vehicles of every character, a double track trolley line and tie us up to the Cumberland County shore, which has now become a part of Greater Harrisburg, just as Pittsburgh spans the Allegheny River and New York City the East River. We will see leading away from the western end of the bridge another main highway other than the old Carlisle Turnpike, paralleling that road, possibly a short distance North, which became necessary to handle

the heavy, increasing traffic in Cumberland County and relieve the congestion which was caused by only one approach to our City.

It is with particular delight that we look across the Susquehanna from our view-point upon the terrace and see along the sky-line directly opposite an attractive park, preserving the old Fort Washington breast works and keeping alive memories dear to the hearts of so many of our citizens and marking the most northern earth-works of the Civil War; and as we look up and down the river, we cannot help but be thrilled with the natural scenic beauties of the Susquehanna, with the magnificent Railroad bridges as well as the perfectly kept parks along the river's banks, with its unique pleasure and sanitary basin for water sports, recreation and health, dotted here and there with wooded islands, all owned by the City and under the control of the Park Board, and we no longer behold the hideous and conspicuous coal wharf marring the beauty of our principal island park in the very heart of this great basin. We also see dotting our shores attractively designed boat houses, under City control, and the river full of canoes, electric launches, hydroplanes and every known pleasure water craft.

From our vantage point we look across Front Street to where our Public Library has grown to such proportions that it is now occupying nearly the entire block and almost an equal distance down Front Street we see the Harrisburg Hospital long since extended over Cherry Avenue into the next block, covering a large area of ground, made necessary by the City's growth.

From the City Entrance we are irresistibly

attracted up the river, along the beautiful sunken path. As we pass beyond State Street and its fine vista of the Capitol, we no longer see the water works and buildings at the foot of North Street, as they have long since been removed and the pumping station added to the filtration plant on the island, and thus, as Hardscrabble is a thing of the past, we have an uninterrupted park, unsurpassed for its scenic beauties, and continuing on to the mountains far beyond. About half way up the River Drive we pass the new bridge connecting McCormick's Island with the main land and extending over the river to Enola, thus supplying a great and convenient playground for the entire upper part of the city west of the Pennsylvania Railroad, as well as easy access to the Cumberland shore, and which with its natural river basin along its entire length equals in charm and attractiveness the City's island playground and basin farther down the river.

It is upon the Rockville Mountain slopes that will be found the great municipal forest, the property of the city, used as a means of holding the water upon its hill-sides, and creating a great playground for the people, and skirting the large forest for miles along the mountain side will be a magnificent boulevard, giving ample access to the woods, and making a charming drive with splendid views of the City, river and valley, and ultimately connecting up with our inner circle parkways through Wildwood Park and the River Drive.

Our parks and natural scenic advantages have not alone gained for us a reputation as "The City Beautiful," for when we stroll through

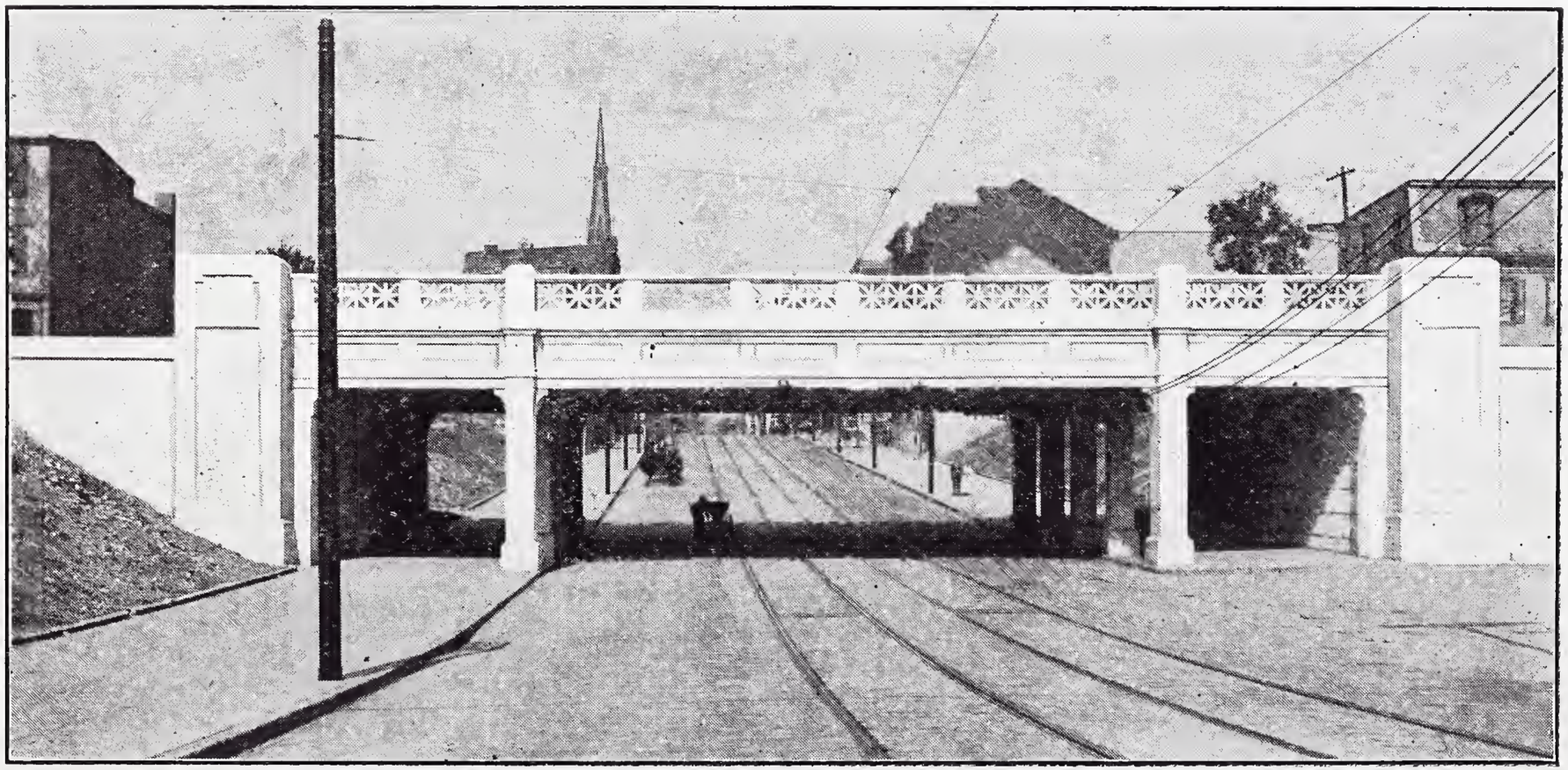
our residential streets we find them lined with miles and miles of magnificent trees, elm, sycamore, Norway and sugar maples and other shade trees, set out and cared for by the City Forester, and planted and well-kept in spacious grass plots which border every residential street, and are also maintained by the Park Department, thus making our City equal in charm with so many of the delightful old cities of New England.

The many years of campaign of education for new housing laws will have placed us a step nearer the ideal, for it will have encouraged the single house, instead of blocks, and our residential sections will be built up of single dwelling, of which Bellevue Park is a splendid example, bountifully supplied with air and light, surrounded with grass and green foliage, making a most pleasing picture along the well paved highways.

It will be very self-evident that we have maintained our reputation as the best paved city of its size in the country. There will be no step backward but a constant effort for better results. The City's repair plant will not only be used for repair work but for the paving of new streets and consequently will lower the cost of paving to the taxpayers. The constant experimental work in the manufacturing of suitable paving materials will have produced cheaper and just as durable substitutes, and enabled the City to pave its miles of streets at considerably reduced cost.

The steady expansion and development of our outlying territory has necessitated the Traction Company extending many of its lines and it is

Second Street Subway



a pleasure to note the trolley cars skirting the bluff along Wildwood Park, making it accessible at a five cent fare to every citizen of Harrisburg and accommodating a large population living in homes along the borders of the park. Another important approach to this great natural park and play-ground has been secured by the construction of a spacious subway at Division Street, thus giving easy access to it and also easy communication for those parts of the City divided by the Pennsylvania Railroad between Maclay Street and Lucknow. We also gladly note the Herr Street Subway utilized by the Traction company to extend its lines on Herr Street to the city limits, to accommodate a long neglected section of the City from a transportation standpoint.

And last but not least in our dream we look up to and actually see the blue heavens, through a clear and smokeless atmosphere, and really recognize them. The smoke nuisance will have been only a hideous nightmare. No more smoke, soot or impure air, for along with the disappearance of our obsolete sewer system from below have gone the smoke impurities from above. Engineering genius has again solved the problem, with a perfect coal combustion, and also the electrification of all the railroads leading into the City and the proper enforcement of the smoke laws—and we breathe at last. Think of the joy of a pure atmosphere —clean hands and faces, reduced laundry bill, housekeeping simplied, an economic as well as a health giving improvement. I hope we will all live to see this dream fulfilled.

Our City with its paved streets, pure water

and air, efficient schools and sanitary sewers, will have been a delightful place in which to live, as its rapidly increasing population had demonstrated, but its wonderful scenery and far famed parks and the art treasures of the Capitol will of themselves cause it to be the mecca of thousands of tourists, who will also be attracted by its reputation for possessing one of the most modern and up-to-date hotels in the country, perfectly appointed in every detail and not only filling the wants of the regular travelling public but making the Capital City very properly also the Convention City of Pennsylvania.

Is this picture that I have so hastily and imperfectly drawn only a dream of the future? Absolutely No! It is simply a question of finance and administration. Look back over the fifteen years just passed. In 1903 our assessed valuation was approximately $26,000,000, with a borrowing limit of $1,109,284, and a tax rate of 7 mills. Today our assessed valuation is $50,336,754, with a borrowing limit of $2,000,000, and a tax rate of 9 mills. At the end of another fifteen years at the same rate of growth we will have $100,000,000 of property and a borrowing limit of $7,000,000, less the existing debt which is continuously being reduced by sinking fund payments.

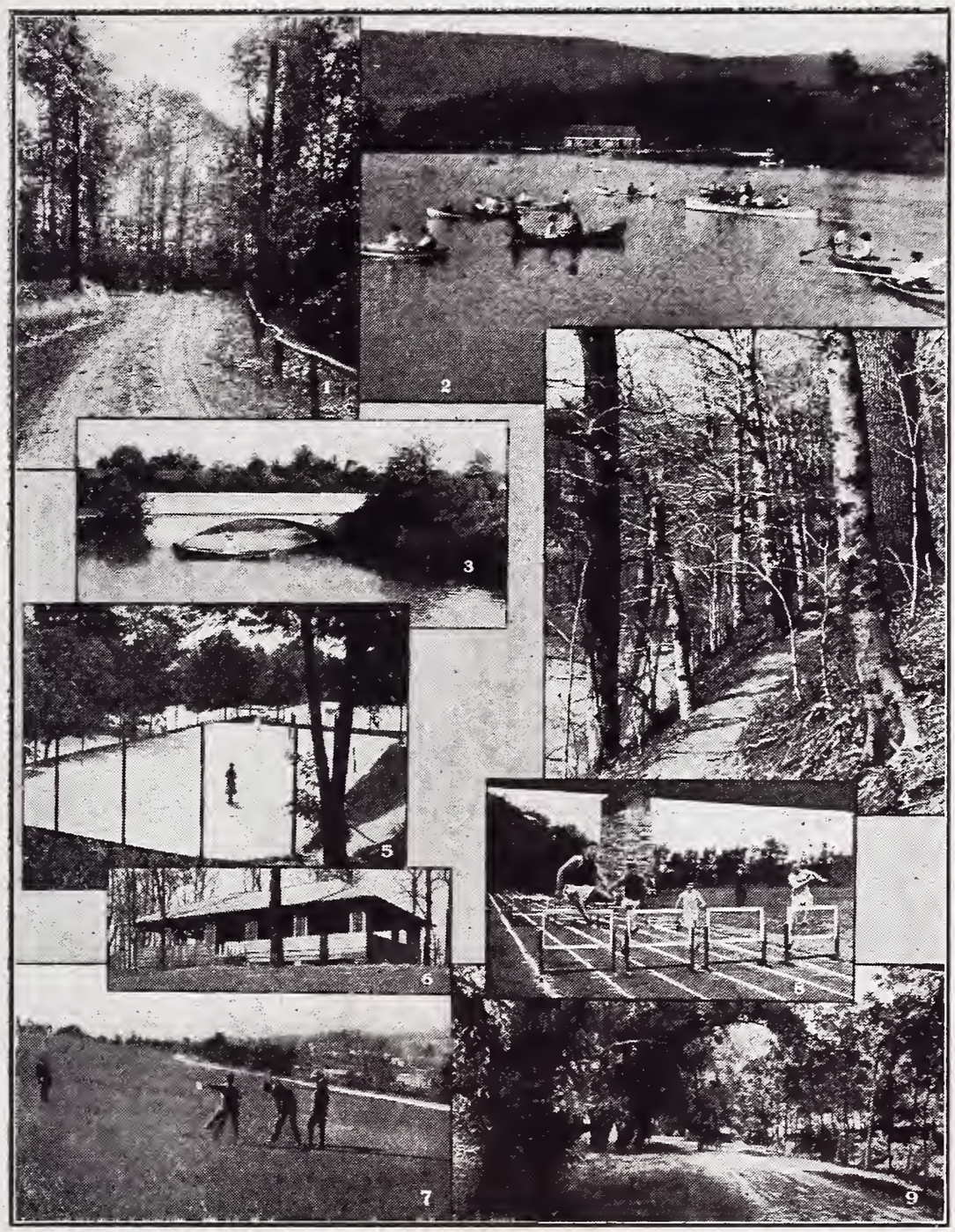
There will be no difficulty in financing permanent improvements in the future, if the present system of short term bonds and sinking fund provisions are continued, but the whole future of our City's progress depends upon its administration. The success of the improvement campaigns we are today celebrating, to

my mind, was due in a large measure to the confidence of the public in the men appointed to office even before the people voted upon the first $1,090,000 loan. With such men as Spencer C. Gilbert, A. C. Stamm and W. L. Gorgas serving as members of the Board of Public Works, without compensation, for the good of the City, the honest and efficient expenditure of the money was assured; and following that precedent an excellent Park Board was appointed, consisting of Messrs. John Hoffer, Samuel Kunkel, C. A. Disbrow, J. P. Luce and J. T. Brady. In the appointment of these two boards was inaugurated a high standard of official efficiency and integrity, which has been maintained during the life of the boards by the subsequent appointees, William Jennings, D. E. Tracy, E. C. Thompson and J. William Bowman on the Board of Public Works, and J. H. McFarland, W. E. Bailey and Henry E. Hershey on the Park Board.

Our citizens are forward-looking and progressive and I believe in the years to come will cheerfully bear their share of taxation for all the improvements necessary to make our City all it should be, provided they know how the money is to be expended. Our best men and our best brains are needed to place our City in the forefront of American cities, where she rightfully belongs—men of great breadth and foresight, who can see the future needs of a great City and direct the handling of a corporation of a hundred million dollars, for that will soon be the value of this corporation in which we are stockholders—directors in fact, with their paid business manager under them

and numerous smaller salaried officials giving their entire time to the City. Such an organization of our City affairs will keep Harrisburg growing, because with the confidence of the taxpayers and the public in their City administration, the financial problem will be an easy one, and Harrisburg will in future years continue to be the pride of us all. Isn't this old City of ours worth some sacrifice and some personal effort, and isn't she worthy of the very best within us rather than indifference and exploitation at the expense of others? I know you will agree with me that it is worth while and after we have made the extra effort and played our individual part for Greater Harrisburg, we can say in the words of Kipling:

"And only the Master shall praise, us, and
only the Master shall blame,
And no one shall work for money and no
one shall work for fame,
But each for the joy of working and each
in his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees it for the
God of Things as they are."



Parks and Recreation Improvements

1—A Road in Wildwood Park
2—Wildwood Lake
3—Bridge in Wildwood
4—Foot-Path, Wildwood
5—Tennis, Reservoir Park
6—Picnic Pavilion, Reservoir Park
7—Golf Course, Reservoir Park
8—Athletics, Island Park
9—Section of the Parkway Road